

INFORMATION ABOUT:

Powder River Basin Resurveys



U.S. Department of the Interior

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The Bureau of Land Management is currently conducting "dependent resurveys" throughout northeast Wyoming. A dependent resurvey is a retracement and re-establishment of the lines of the original survey in their true original positions, according to the best available evidence of those positions. The object of the dependent resurvey is to establish the lines of the original survey as they were rather than as they should have been. A dependent resurvey does not change titles, areas, or descriptions of the lands. Under fundamental law the corners of the original survey are unchangeable. Even if the original survey was poorly executed, it still controls the boundaries of land patented under it. The original surveys in this area were executed under contract for the U.S. General Land Office in the 1880s and the majority have not been officially resurveyed since.

The original surveys throughout this area are in very poor condition as a result of several factors. The poor quality of sandstones used for the original monuments, poor workmanship of the original surveyors, inability to determine exact location by original patentees, inadvertent obliteration by construction and energy exploration activity, etc. Since the original corners cannot be moved, it is essential that the original stones are located in the course of the dependent resurveys.

Once all the remaining original corner stones have been located, lost corners must be re-established at proportionate distances based on the plat of the original survey. The idea that property lines are being moved is misleading. The resurveys re-establish and remonument the lines of the original surveys based on the best available evidence.

Our authority to resurvey public lands, the surface of which has already been patented but in which the minerals have been reserved to the United States, stems from 43 U.S.C. 772 stated in part below:

"The Secretary of the interior may . . . in his discretion cause to be made ... such resurveys or retracements of the public lands as, after full investigation, he may deem essential to properly mark the boundaries of the public lands remaining undisposed of: Provided, that no such resurvey or retracement shall be so executed as to impair the bona fide rights or claims of any claimant, entryman, or owner of lands affected by such resurvey."

The Cadastral Survey Project Office in Gillette opened April 1, 1986, employing six survey crews with the goal of resurveying the Powder River Basin. The Powder River Basin is defined by geological structure encompassing all of Campbell County and portions of Crook, Weston, Niobrara, Converse, Natrona, Johnson, and Sheridan Counties. This area includes roughly 300 townships in need of resurvey, each containing 36 sections 1 mile square, or approximately 23,000 acres per township. Of these 300 townships, 105 are in urgent need of resurvey. Each survey crew can complete approximately 2½ townships per year establishing survey monuments every half mile along each section line. These resurveys are being executed to define the Federal interest boundaries, both surface and subsurface. Once the field work is complete in each township, the field surveyor writes a set of field notes (describing all bearings and distances along the lines of the resurvey and all monuments) and compiles a rough draft plat. The field notes and plat are then reviewed for accuracy, correctness, and legal survey procedure. Upon approval they then become the official record of survey for the remaining Federal estate.